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## Feature

# Katsina community, where residents live in perpetual fear

By Habibu Umar Aminu, Katsina | Publish Date: Feb 11 2018 2:00AM

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Gurbi village, a border community to Rugu forest, the enclave of bandits

Since the gruesome murder of a 56-year-old businessman, Alhaji Saminu Guy in Jibia town, precisely at Magama, Katsina State, a



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fortnight ago, people in the community and neighbouring villages have once again been thrown into a state of anxiety and fear.

Jibia is a cosmopolitan Katsina border town full of social and economic activities. The town borders Niger Republic, as well as Zamfara and Sokoto states.

Prior to the recent assassination, the town was basically under siege by kidnappers and other bandits who terrorised the people day and night. But the attacks stopped for a while, only to return with a new dimension.

Daily Trust on Sunday gathered that after killing Guy, his assailants took away his mobile phone and have been calling several unsuspecting contacts like his friends, associates, family members and business partners, demanding various amounts of money and claiming that he was kidnapped.

Many people in Jibia, Lagos and Abuja are said to have been reached. Many of them tried to confirm the authenticity of such call.

More worrisome is an audio message purportedly being shared by the kidnappers, asking residents of the town to pay N20million to completely stop attacks in the town or N10million for an intermittent break. This demand has aggravated the already tensed atmosphere in the town as there's growing suspicion among residents. No one trusts another.

The deceased's younger brother, Alhaji Wali Jibia, said he told those who were called on phone to confirm the whereabouts of Guy and not to comply with the assailants' demands because he had been murdered and already buried.

"God will judge the assailants, whether they were hired or not. They have subjected us to great pains. We pray to God to make them experience the same sorrow and agony we are passing through.

"Eyewitnesses told us that three men came on motorcycles and shot him. He tried getting to his bike to zoom off, but he fell on the ground. They shot him twice again when he was on the ground. They took only his mobile phone.



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"We also learnt that they vowed to continue killing people in the community unless certain amounts of money are paid to them. We have reported this to the police," he said.

In one of the audio messages, purportedly by one of the kidnappers who identified himself as Audu Saninka Bala'l, Saninka Masifa and based in Zamfara State, the group said they were responsible for several abductions and killings in the town, including that of a pregnant woman in September last year. He said they were sponsored to kill Alhaji Saminu.

In a recorded discussion, when asked how he could be reached for the money, the kidnapper said, "As soon as the money is ready, link up and I will tell you how to find me. Before I killed him, he gave me his friends' numbers. He told me everything.

"If you want me to stop these killings, raise the said amount and I will disclose the location of my sponsor so you can get to him. He lives among you; we only communicate on phone and meet at designated places.

"If you have the money, in less than 20 minutes come along Zamfara road from Jibia. You must come alone. If we see any security vehicle you will go in for it.

"The moment the money is paid, all these killings will stop and I will expose those doing it.

"Your safety is guaranteed. And you will give me the money in public. If you can arrest me, let's see how. When you get to Gurbi, call me. This is a secret: I will tell my sponsor to let go or I will expose him. If you want me to kill him I will do so."

He mentioned eight other people on his target list, as well as those he killed in the past. "I kidnapped and killed that pregnant woman. I also killed Na Uruku and one petroleum station owner two years ago. There was also a kolonut seller. They refused to pay and I killed them."

Asked how he gets his weapons, the kidnapper laughed and said the security operatives are compromised, adding that they know what to do.

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He further revealed how they killed a businessman in Maradi, a neighbouring town in Niger Republic, after collecting N20million.

Our correspondent gathered that several people in the community are complying secretly while others are confused about what to do.

Aside Jibia and Magama towns, Kaura Namoda, Faru, Kukar Na Bahausha, Kukar Maigarke, Tsayau and villages between Katsina and Zamfara states, especially those before the border town of Gurbin Baure in Katsina axis, have been subjected to various attacks from these bandits.

The most dangerous spots along the said road are Chabas-Chabas, Dogon Karfe and Danbedi. They are known as motorists' and commuters' nightmare.

Curiously, as a border town, Jibia is full of security personnel. During a trip to the town, one is bound to encounter at least 20 security posts.

Three months ago, residents of Jibia sent a save-our-soul message to security agencies over the increasing banditry cases, yet it has continued. Some residents of the town, who did not want their names mentioned, told Daily Trust on Sunday that cases of kidnapping and other forms of banditry were recorded on a weekly basis.

A school teacher who pleaded anonymity said a seven-month pregnant woman was kidnapped and her father paid N200,000 to secure her release. A businessman known as Naruwa was also kidnapped and his family paid N500,000 to secure his release.

Narrating his ordeal, a man who was attacked in a foiled kidnap attempt said,

"I was asleep when the bandits stormed our house, asking for our father. During the scuffle they shot at me. I nearly died.

"Just go outside this town, especially around Gurbin Baure and you will see small boys carrying weapons. We strongly believe that they are kidnappers."

The village head of Gurbin Baure, Ibrahim Maigari said, "We appreciate the efforts of the Katsina State Government, but our



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main challenge is the menace of bandits from Zurmi in Zamfara State. Two days ago, one of our sons narrowly escaped death when he was shot by bandits.

“They have banned us from feeding our animals as they attack us the moment we approach the forest. Our crops have been vandalised.”

Also speaking, the chairman of Jibia People’s Forum, Gide Dahiru, said that on a daily basis, not less than 10 houses are raided by the bandits. He attributed the rising cases of insecurity in the town to a nearby settlement on the border, known as Hirji. “All sorts of indecent people across Nigeria and Niger Republic throng the town to enjoy life,” he said.

Another resident lamented that instead of tackling crimes at the border, security operatives concentrate on major roads, where they extort money from motorists.

Chairman of the Police Community Relations Committee in the community, Yusuf Sule, said they had formed groups to support the police in checking crimes in the area. “We are doing our best through effective patrols to minimise the crime rate in the area,” he said.

As part of efforts to find solution to the insecurity in the area, Katsina State Governor Aminu Masari, last week hosted his Zamfara State counterpart, Abdul- Aziz Yari, alongside two military brigade commanders.

In a statement, the director-general, media and publicity to Governor Masari, Ibrahim Muazzam, said the meeting became necessary as a result of the activities of bandits in the forest.

On his part, Gov Yari lauded the efforts of his counterpart at stamping out cattle rustling, armed robbery and other forms of banditry in the area. “We will put all hands on deck to further check the ugly trend,” he promised. He said there was the need for both states to work out permanent modalities that would ensure adequate security in the affected areas.

Responding, Governor Masari assured that modalities would be worked out among the military, police and other security outfits for a





proper handling of the situation.

He said a joint patrol between Army and the Air Force would be intensified around the forest.

When contacted, the spokesman of the Katsina State Police Command, DSP Gambo Isah, said they were aware of the development in Jibia, adding that senior officers had listened to the audio message in circulation and were reviewing it.

“We have identified some of those involved,” he said, adding that a massive undercover surveillance is going on to fish out collaborators. He said adequate security had been provided for those the hoodlums threatened in the said audio message. He assured that all the perpetrators of the dastardly act would soon be brought to book. He advised residents to always provide the police with useful information on the activities of criminals, promising that such information would be treated confidentially.

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